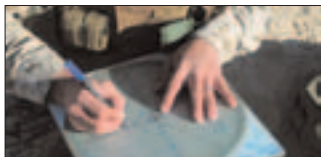


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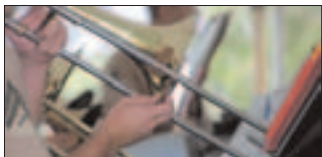
VOLUME 37, NUMBER 7

THOMAS JEFFERSON AWARD WINNING METRO FORMAT NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 16, 2007



Mortar
A-3



Band
B-1



Pro Bowl
C-1

Wounded Marine rides back in style

Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

HICKAM AIR FORCE BASE, Hawaii — A Marine wounded in Iraq traveled the final leg of his journey back to his unit in style Feb. 8.

Lance Cpl. Steven Eastburn, a member of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, at Kaneohe Bay, arrived back in Hawaii on an executive jet, after being offered a ride from Travis Air Force Base, Calif., by Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Eastburn was undergoing treatment at Travis for wounds he suffered in Haqlaniyah, Iraq, Jan. 31.

Pace visited service members at David Grant Medical Center at Travis while his C-40B aircraft was being refueled. Eastburn was at the hospital, and Pace asked the 20-year-old Marine if he would like a ride back to Hawaii. "Of course I said, 'Sure,'" the Marine said.

"This is a big government plane," the chairman said. "We can always make room for one more."

Eastburn was wounded while

pulling guard as his squad was setting up an observation post. A sniper shot him through the right arm just above the elbow.

"There was a second shot, but he missed," the lance corporal said. "My squad leader came out to get me."

His squad gave him immediate attention, then got him to a medevac point. He was flown to Balad Air Base, Iraq, and then Landstuhl, Germany, before going on to Andrews Air Force Base, Md., and finally to Travis.

At Andrews, Eastburn received a new treatment called a peripheral nerve block. The treatment uses a machine to place a small bit of local anesthetic into the affected area.

"It gives the wound a chance to heal without the side effects of morphine or other drugs," said Air Force Lt. Col. Bill Whelan, a flight surgeon traveling with the chairman. "Many people get nauseous due to the side effects of morphine. But with this, Steven is able to eat and gain strength. He's doing well."

Eastburn will be assigned to

Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii, closer to his unit's home base.

As the jet pulled up to the distinguished visitor area at Hickam, a number of people were there to meet and greet the chairman and his wife, Lynne. Eastburn's parents were also there. The chairman came up the aisle of the plane and told the young lance corporal to "lead everybody off the plane."

"Thanks for the ride, Sir," the lance corporal told Pace. "I won't forget it."



Cpl. Mark Fayloga

Marines and Sailors from various Marine Corps Base Hawaii commands "snap in" during Security Augmentation Force training at the baseball field next to the Provost Marshal's Office, Feb. 7. Last week's SAF training was the first time Sailors were implemented into the course.

Marines, Sailors train together to provide base security

Cpl. Mark Fayloga

Combat Correspondent

More than 50 Marines and Sailors from around Marine Corps Base Hawaii recently completed Security Augmentation Force training Friday.

The service members spent more than a week, training in such areas as riot control,

perimeter security, weapons handling, vehicle inspection and several other issues vital to maintaining security.

The Security Augmentation Force is organized as an available augment to the Military Police in the instance of a threat or incident on base.

While the SAF has always existed, last week's class was

unique in that it was the first training class to incorporate Sailors.

"It's (last week's class) the first time we've integrated the Navy commands that are a part of our Navy-Marine Corps Team here at K-Bay into the training," said Jacque Freeland, emergency and future planning, G-3.

During the training, MCBH Commanding General Brig. Gen. Steven A. Hummer dropped in to visit the students and to reiterate the importance of the Navy-Marine Corps team and how SAF is an important part of that team.

See TRAIN, A-6

Iraqis responding to security mission

Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — The new security plan for Baghdad is progressing as planned, with Iraqi brigades arriving as promised and the first elements of the U.S. "surge" force operating with them in the capital city, Defense Department officials told Pentagon reporters today.

Army Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute, director of operations for the Joint Staff, joined Mark Kimmitt, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Near East and South Asian affairs, in reporting during a Pentagon briefing that the Iraqis appear to be rising to their commitments as the new security plan for Baghdad is implemented.

"Early progress has been made," Lute said. "We're beginning to see good, solid evidence across all the lines of commitment made by the Iraqi government."

While recognizing that it's still very early in the effort, Lutz said early indications show "so far, so good."

"The aim, of course, is to break the cycle of sectarian violence and thereby provide time and space to the Iraqi political structure to give them an opportunity to assume more fully complete political, economic and military lead in their own country," he said.

On the security front, Iraqi brigades now are assigned to seven of the nine Baghdad districts, where they are working in partnership with seven U.S. battalions, he said.

Within these districts, the first 10 joint security stations have opened, providing a 24/7 security presence, he said. These centers, eventually to number about 30, are being manned jointly by Iraqi army and Iraqi national and local police, as well as their U.S. support chain.

See MISSION, A-6

Weapons Company goes back to basics

Cpl. Rick Nelson

Combat Correspondent

CAMP WILSON, Calif. — Marines assigned to Combined Anti-Armor Teams 1 and 2, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, conducted station training inside of Camp Wilson, Calif., that refreshed them on standard operating procedures for certain events they could encounter while in Iraq.

The training evolution included stations dealing with improvised explosive device attacks, vehicle recovery, vehicle checkpoints, loading and unloading procedures and accessing casualties.

"All the stuff Marines are being taught out here is something they

should practice and rehearse making this stuff sink into their skull so when the time comes it will be muscle memory," said Staff Sgt. Scott A. Wheeler, operations instructor, Tactical Training Education Group, Twentynine Palms, Calif.

These are all scenarios that could very well happen while in Iraq, said Sgt. Luis E. Maceira, section leader, CAAT-2, Weapons Company, 1/3.

"This basic knowledge they're obtaining is all stuff they've been taught before, but we're just refreshing their memories and throwing some new things at them," the Humacao, Puerto Rico, native said. "The more training we do, the faster and more efficient we will be when we get in

theater, which means we will have less mishaps."

While in Iraq, the Lava Dogs who make up the CAAT teams will do many security patrols and route reconnaissance missions.

"When we finally get to Iraq we're going to be doing a lot of both dismounted and mounted patrols, so during Mojave Viper we're going to be doing a lot of training for both," the 34-year-old added. "We're fortunate because we're going to be trained on the big guns like the fifty caliber machine-gun, but also doing line company type stuff, when not all Marines have that chance."

See BASICS, A-4



Cpl. Rick Nelson

Staff Sgt. Scott A. Wheeler, operations instructor, Tactical Training Education Group, instructs Marines from Combined Anti-Armor Teams 1 and 2, Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, on specific ways to tow a recovered vehicle Feb. 5, at Camp Wilson, Calif.

NEWS BRIEFS

Base holds National Prayer Breakfast

Marine Corps Base Hawaii will conduct a National Prayer Breakfast Thursday from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m. at Anderson Hall Dining Facility. Doors will open for breadfast at 6 a.m. The uniform for all personnel is the Uniform of the Day.

Marine Corps Base Hawaii Tax Center

The center is open now thru April 17 for those who would like to have their taxes done by the professionals. The center will be open for appointments and walk-ins Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The center is located on the second floor of Building 279. Call 257-4829 for directions and information.

If you are coming to the center to have your taxes done, bring:

- W2 Forms
- Bank account number and bank's routing number
- Copy of last year's tax return
- All other tax forms (1099s, etc.)

KOSC Annual Art Auction

All Hands are invited to the KOSC Annual Art Auction Feb. 24 from 6 to 10 p.m. at the Officers' Club aboard Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay. The auction will begin with an art preview and pupus at 6 p.m. with the auction beginning at 7 p.m. For more information and tickets, contact Sherry at k-bayartauction@hotmail.com.

Control Your Pet or Lose Privileges

There has been a recent spike in pet-related complaints concerning dog bites. Base Order 5500.15B, Chap. 4, clearly states: "Persons walking dogs in public must have positive physical control of their dogs," and housing handbooks clearly state: "If your pet is leashed outdoors, the leash must be less than 20 feet long, and the animal may not move outside your yard."

If you have questions about pet regulations, please refer to the Family Housing handbook or contact your area housing inspector. Additionally, the Game Warden Office may be of further assistance and can be reached at 257-1821.

TRICARE enrollment

MARADMIN 326/06 mandates that all active duty Marines be enrolled in TRICARE Prime. A roster identifying Marines who are not enrolled can be found by visiting www.usmc.mil and following the links to Career - Manpower and Reserve Affairs - Active Marine - Personal and Family Readiness Division (MR) - Military Personnel Services - TRI-CARE.

Hawaii Marine Accepts Letters

Hawaii Marine invites its readers to e-mail its editor at editor@hawaiimarine.com with their comments and letters.

All submissions will be edited for clarity and length. Comments must be signed with a full name and a telephone number must be provided.

Hawaii Marine also accepts news briefs containing relevant information pertaining to Marine Corps Base Hawaii.

Important Phone Numbers:

On-Base Emergencies	911
Military Police	257-7114
Child Protective Service	832-5300
Fraud, Waste, Abuse & EEO	257-8852
Business Management Hotline	257-3188
Pothole & Streetlight Repair	257-2380
Base Information	449-7110
MCBH Duty Chaplain	257-7700
DEERS	257-2077

Hawaii MARINE

www.mcbh.usmc.mil

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Avoid kickbacks: Tax center stresses service members bring correct information

Sgt. Michelle M. Dickson

Combat Correspondent

With tax season in full swing, Marines and Sailors working at the Tax Center aboard Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, are ensuring service members are getting their tax refunds on time, providing tax filers remember to bring the correct information with them.

"We are getting some kick backs because Marines and Sailors may think they know their child or spouse's correct social security number," said Gunnery Sgt. Patricia V. White, staff noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Tax Center. "They end up being incorrect and the claim gets kicked back. If all the information and documents are provided when we initially do their taxes, then there won't be any mistakes."

Service members are stressed to bring all their 2006 W-2's to include their spouse's W-2's. They also must bring their W-2's from other states if they have recently moved to the island.

According to White, all documents must be brought to include the service member's banking number, the checking account number and routing number. If the filer has a spouse and children, the spelling on the original social security number card must be the same on the return.

"We are getting returns back because the spouse gave us her married name and did not report the name change to the Social Security office," said White, a Syracuse, N.Y., native. "The SSN office still has her maiden name listed. The IRS gets their information from the SSN office. The return and the SSN office have to have the same name or it gets rejected."

White said service members should also bring their year-end information for investments to include: stocks, bonds, mutual funds, IRA's, property bought or sold, rental property, and mortgage interest paid information as well.

According to White, some service members may experience a delay in their tax returns due to the 'Extenders,' which refers to tax law provisions included in the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006. Several of these provisions were tax law which expired at the end of 2005 or were scheduled to expire at the end of 2006. This recent legislation simply extended these provisions.

Due to this, educators with out-of-pocket classroom expenses, taxpayers planning to claim the tuition and fees deduction, and taxpayers choosing to deduct local and state sales tax should wait to prepare and file their return on or after Feb. 3. If the taxpayer doesn't want to wait, the return should be prepared and filed as a paper return.

The tax center aboard base accepts walk-ins from 8 a.m - 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on Wednesday, when the center is opened for walk-ins from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. Appointments can be made ahead of time if one wishes to do so.

If disabled or elderly personnel cannot make it up to the second floor of Building 279, a simple phone call will allow them to get their taxes done at the base legal services building.

"If they call ahead, we can have someone meet them at base legal, making their experience easier. "We try to fit into people's schedules no matter what. Especially for service members who are deploying," said White.

"We set aside block days for units who are getting ready to deploy and make those days fit into their training schedule. They shouldn't have to worry about things like getting their taxes done when they are going on leave before a deployment; we try to take care of that for them."

White said she also wants to stress to

the service members that both state and federal taxes are done at the tax center.

"Some people don't realize that we do both federal and state taxes here," said White. "They shouldn't have to go out in town and pay money to get their taxes done when it's a free service here."

The tax center will be open until April 17, but White said the services will still be provided at the legal assistance office during the off season, especially for units who may have been deployed.

For more information, or to make an appointment at the tax center, call 257-4829.

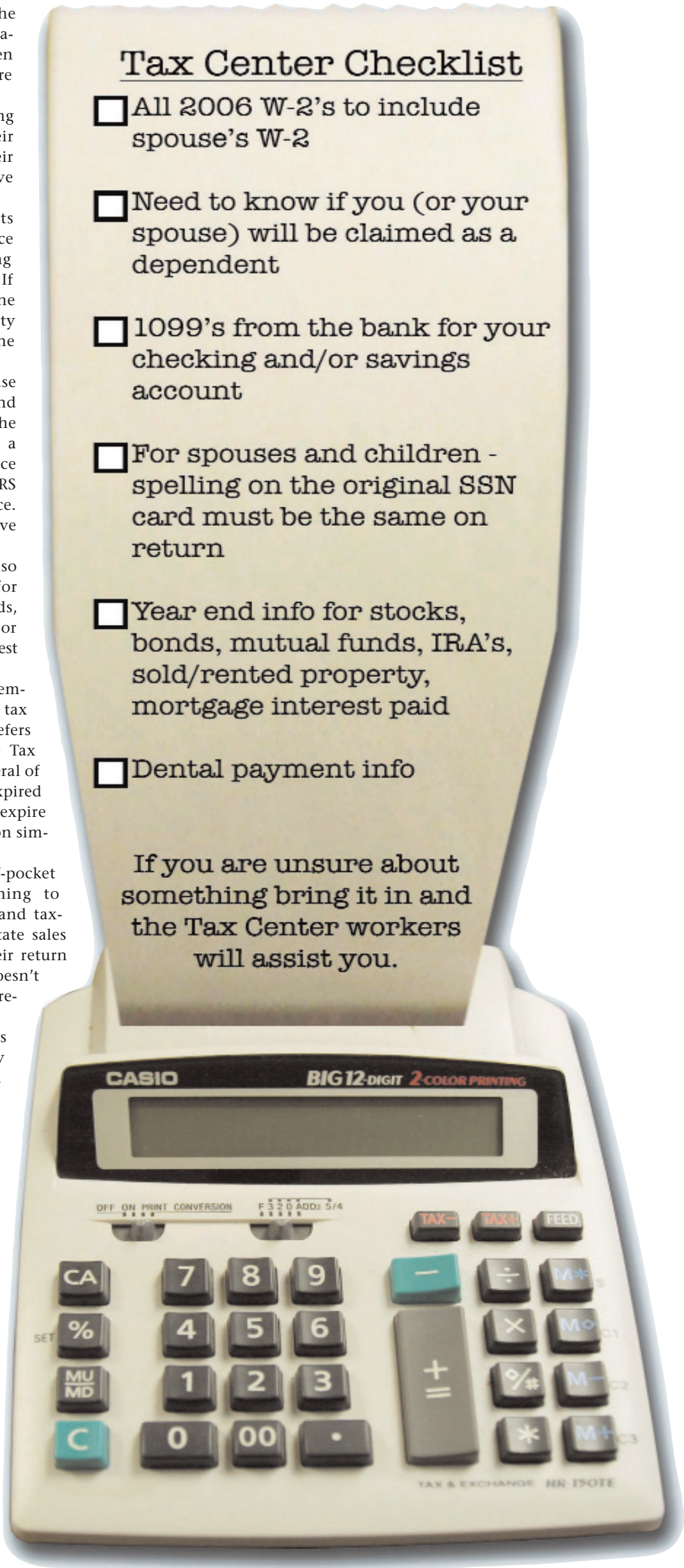


Photo illustration by Cpl. Mark Fayloga

Weekend weather outlook

Today



Day — Scattered showers. Partly cloudy, with a high near 79. East wind between 11 and 15 mph, with gusts as high as 23 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

Night — Scattered showers. Partly cloudy, with a low around 70. East wind around 11 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

High — 79

Low — 70

Saturday



Day — Scattered showers. Partly cloudy, with a high near 77. Breezy, with a east wind between 11 and 21 mph, with gusts as high as 26 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

Night — Scattered showers. Partly cloudy, with a low around 70. East wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

High — 77

Low — 70

Sunday



Day — Scattered showers. Partly cloudy, with a high near 77. Breezy, with a east wind between 15 and 21 mph, with gusts as high as 26 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

Night — Scattered showers. Partly cloudy, with a low around 69. East wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

High — 77

Low — 69



Lance Cpl. Benjamin D. Esqueda, Weapons Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, guides Lance Cpl. Jason J. Carey, rifleman, in placing the aiming stick during dry fire drills Feb. 1 at Camp Wilson, Calif. Marines from Weapons Platoon are training for their upcoming deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in late March.

Weapons Platoon conducts mortar training

Story and Photos by
Cpl. Rick Nelson
Combat Correspondent

CAMP WILSON, Calif. — Marines assigned to Weapons Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, conducted 60 millimeter mortar dry-fire training in order to build up speed on preparation of the different weapon systems.

While in Iraq, these Marines will form a Combined Anti-Armor Team, so it will be beneficial for the Marines to be proficient on each weapon, said Lance Cpl. Scott A. Sola, Weapons Platoon, Alpha Company, 1/3.

"Today we're doing bore sight adjustments to make the sights look in the same direction as the barrel and to make sure all of the other guns are aimed at the same point," the Algonquin, Ill., native said. "What we're basically doing out here is bringing everyone up to be efficient at everyone's job. I think doing training evolutions like this is going to help us out a lot when combat time comes."

According to the Dundee-Crown High School native, the Marines are already starting to show

signs of improvement since the beginning of their training one week ago.

"I've noticed a dramatic change in all the Marines during their training," said Cpl. Keith Monge, squad leader, Alpha Company, 1/3. "I think once all of our training is done out here, we will be right where we need to be."

During the training the Lava Dogs were timed to make sure they were progressing, getting faster each time.

"Just today the Marines have knocked off almost five minutes from their gun set-up and sighting time," said Sola.

Marines from Alpha Company still have many live-fire drills, indirect fire support training and other training evolutions left before they depart Twentynine Palms and put all of their training to use in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"At this point in the game I think any training we can squeeze in will be good training," said Monge, a Fajardo, Puerto Rico native. "But how things are going now, there's not a doubt in my mind we're going to be prepared for Iraq. We're showing improvements already and we still have over four weeks left to train."



Lance Cpl. Scott A. Sola, an Algonquin, Ill., native with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, plots coordinates on a map for the other Marines during dry fire drills.

Lance Cpl. Benjamin D. Esqueda, Weapons Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, assists Lance Cpl. Jason J. Carey, rifleman, with positioning the 60mm mortar.



Lance Cpl. Scott A. Sola uses a multi-purpose tool to adjust sights on a 60mm mortar.



Lance Cpl. Scott A. Sola, gunner, Weapons Platoon, Alpha Company, 1/3 makes adjustments to the sights of a 60mm mortar. The high-angle-of-fire weapon can be drop-fired or trigger-fired.





Lance Cpl. R. Drew Hendricks

Lieutenant Gen. John F. Goodman, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific awards the Legion of Merit to Sgt. Maj. Eugene E. McPeek.

Sergeant major says farewell to life of 30 years

Lance Cpl. R. Drew Hendricks
U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific

CAMP H. M. SMITH, Hawaii — Sgt. Maj. Eugene E. McPeek speaks to the crowd and assembled Marines during his retirement ceremony at Bordelon Field here, Feb. 9.

McPeek, a native of Albuquerque, New Mexico, enlisted in the Marine Corps on March 11, 1977.

Since then he has served 30 distinguished years in the Marine Corps.

During the ceremony he was also

awarded the Legion of Merit by Lt. Gen. John F. Goodman, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific.

In addition to serving with many different commands around the Marine Corps, including Delta Company, 4th Reconnaissance Battalion, 4th Marine Division, McPeek worked for the Albuquerque Fire Department where he retired as the deputy fire chief in 2002.

In January 2003, he assumed his current post as the Reserve Sergeant Major, MarForPac.

As a Marine who has served as a

reservist and an active duty service member he truly knows how hard transitions can be.

“Reserve and active duty Marines are in the same fight together,” he said. “We are truly a seamless all-volunteer force.”

McPeek’s personal decorations include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal and the Combat Action Ribbon.

Navy, Marines request funding to repair, replace equipment

Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — The Navy and Marine Corps are requesting \$4.4 billion to fix or replace worn out or damaged military equipment that has seen hard use in the war against global terrorism, senior military leaders testified before a joint U.S. House committee on Capitol Hill yesterday.

Congress deserves thanks for already providing about \$10.2 billion for repair or replacement of Navy and Marine equipment as part of fiscal 2006 and 2007 supplemental funding, Lt. Gen. Emerson Gardner, the Marines’ deputy commandant for programs and resources, said before members of the Sea Power and Expeditionary Forces subcommittees.

“For over five years, the Marine Corps has been involved in combat and combat support operations around the globe,” Gardner said. “Your deployed Marines are better trained, better equipped and better protected than ever before.”

In fact, about \$2.8 billion in funding is earmarked for obtaining 2,700 roadside-bomb-resistant trucks, known as mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles, for Marines and sailors deployed to Iraq, Gardner said. About 65 of these robust vehicles are being used in Iraq, he said.

“Our experience is that Marines in these vehicles have been four to five times safer than a Marine in an armored Humvee,” Gardner said. “Based on this experience, we recently decided to replace our armored Humvees in theater on a one-for-one basis with MRAPs.”

The Marine Corps also will plus-up its ranks, Gardner noted, by adding around 5,000 new Marines each year until the Corps’ new end strength of about 202,000 Marines is reached by 2011.

“We are initially funding this effort through a mix of baseline and supplemental appropriations,” Gardner explained. “But, we are eager to get these costs into our baseline budget as soon as possible.”

About 42,000 U.S. sailors are deployed worldwide, said Vice Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert, deputy chief of naval operations for integration of capabilities and resources, who also testified at the hearing. More than 12,000 sailors are serving on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, Greenert said.

High-demand naval combat engineers, known as Seabees; Sea, Air and Land special operations forces; and explosive ordnance disposal teams deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq are experiencing rapid wearing out of their equipment, Greenert said. Some equipment is wearing out on average 14 times faster than during peacetime usage, he noted.

Other equipment, such as field generators, are wearing out 40 times faster, Greenert said.

In addition, Navy aircraft like the F/A-18 Hornet are aging rapidly due to excessive amounts of mission flight time, the admiral said.



Cpl. Mark Fayloga

Lance Cpl. Allan D. Jiricka, Combat Service Support Group 3 mechanic, practices a maneuver taught during Security Augmentation Force class with Petty Officer 2nd Class Charles Chadwick, Commander Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing 2, Feb. 7.

TRAIN, from A-1

“Every day we’re doing things together as the Navy-Marine Corps team, and this (training) is another example of how we work together,” said Hummer. “We can’t do the things we want to do without fundamental security, and now you’re in the process of becoming a big part of that security should an incident occur to call you into assistance.”

The Marines and Sailors trained for SAF came from various commands on base and for many the training was a welcome break from their daily routine.

“I like the change of pace,” said Lance Cpl. Ambrosio L. Fox, administration clerk, Hawaii Installation Personnel Administration Center. “It’s something new for me, getting to do Marine Corps training – shooting the pistol, getting sprayed with (oleoresin capsicum) and getting training outside of my (military occupational specialty). I’m glad I’m here and I’m looking forward to putting my new training to use if they ever need me.”

In addition to new training, the course afforded one Sailor the opportunity to work alongside his ‘Green’ counterparts.

“I spent ten years at sea and I never saw a Marine so this is my first Marine experience,” said Petty Officer 1st Class Winston S. Egenberg, ground safety, Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing Two. “Working with them has been really good and I’m enjoying it.”

Fox also enjoyed the opportunity to train with fellow service members of a different branch because it allowed him to better understand his sea brethren while learning alongside them.

“It doesn’t matter what service you’re in while going through this training because we’re both learning,” said Fox. “I think that learning together is good because I used to look at the other services and wonder what they do, but now I know that they’re just like us.”

MISSION, from A-1

The first of three Iraqi army brigades slated to move into Baghdad is already operating there, and a second brigade is en route, Lute reported. The third brigade is programmed to deploy later this month.

Of five U.S. brigades to become part of the “plus-up,” the first, the 82nd Airborne Division’s 2nd Brigade, is already operating

in Baghdad. The second of the five brigades is en route to Kuwait, from which it will move into Baghdad. Three other brigades are still in the United States, doing preparatory training before they deploy, he said.

U.S. forces on the ground “are satisfied with the strength,” of the arriving Iraq units, Kimmitt said. He emphasized that the security plan “was built recognizing the

difference between U.S. and Iraqi units,” and that Iraqi troops must leave their units to take their pay home to their families.

“Thus far, the units ... are coming in at an adequate level for them to perform the Baghdad security plan,” Kimmitt said. “The number of what they’d come with was fully anticipated by the planners, and it’s still within the range that they

believe is going to provide successful in the Baghdad security plan.”

Lute emphasized that as the Iraqis move increasingly into the lead for their operations, U.S. troops will remain under U.S. command. “There will be an unbroken link from the privates on the ground to the president of the United States,” he said. “It will never break.”

New commander takes helm of Multinational Force Iraq

Army Sgt. Sara Wood
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Acknowledging the challenges ahead and pledging full effort, Army Gen. David H. Petraeus took the helm of the top U.S. command in Iraq on Feb. 10 in Baghdad.

Petraeus, who was promoted to general just before the change-of-command ceremony, assumed command from Army Gen. George W. Casey Jr., who has led Multinational Force Iraq since July 2004. Petraeus previously commanded the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Casey is set to become the next Army chief of staff.

“This morning’s ceremony truly is a humbling experience for me, and the challenges ahead are substantial,” Petraeus said after officially taking command. “The rucksack of responsibility is very heavy. In truth, it is too heavy for any one person to bear, and we will all have to share the burdens and move forward together. If we can do that and if we can help the people of Iraq do likewise, then the prospects for success are good.”

Petraeus thanked Casey for his leadership and sacrifices, and

pledged to give the servicemembers and civilians of MNFI the best leadership and direction he can provide. The coalition’s job in the coming months will be to work with Iraqi forces to improve security so the Iraqi government can resolve economic issues and improve basic services, he said.

“The way ahead will be hard, and there undoubtedly will be many tough days,” Petraeus said. “As I recently told the members of the United States Senate, however, ‘hard’ is not ‘hopeless’; indeed, together with our Iraqi partners, we can and we must prevail.”

In relinquishing command, Casey noted the progress Iraq has made since it achieved its sovereignty. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraqis were totally dependent on the coalition for security, he said. Now, through the unwavering support of the Iraqi people and security forces and coalition forces, Iraq is on the verge of taking responsibility for its own security by the end of this year, he said.

“The past that brought us to this point has not been easy, but it has been part of a concerted effort to build an Iraq that can secure, sustain and govern itself,” Casey said. “Freedom isn’t free, and it never has been. It happens

through blood, sweat and determination, and you have brought all of those things to this fight.”

Casey said the challenge of overcoming sectarian violence and building a representative government is one the coalition can help with, but that will ultimately rest on the shoulders of the Iraqis themselves. He said he is optimistic about the future of Iraq because he believes in the inherent desire of all people to live in freedom. The general added that he sees Iraqis taking charge of their future.

Casey also expressed confidence in the competence and professionalism of the men and women of the coalition. “You are the best fighting force in the world, and you bring intellect, drive, compassion, courage and commitment to this mission,” he said. “I see it every day in the conduct of your duties, and I also

have growing confidence in the men and women of the Iraqi security forces. And I have no doubt that they will emerge over the coming years as the dominant security forces in Iraq.”

Army Gen. John Abizaid, commander of U.S. Central Command, noted Casey’s many accomplishments while commanding in Iraq, such as facilitating national elections, combat

actions, building institutions, and developing leaders.

“Thank you for your calm, professional leadership, for your toughness, for your wise counsel to those both above and below your level of command,” Abizaid said to Casey. “Most important, thank you for your patient support of a great people in their new destiny. History will smile upon your accomplishments.”

Abizaid also spoke about the challenges facing Iraq. No nation in the modern age can allow murderers and terrorists to kill without remorse or intimidation, torture and extortion to rule above the law, he said. Sectarian violence and division have no place in the future of Iraq, a nation that is great because of its ability to overcome ethnic and religious differences, he said.

“Stand together and take your rightful place in the modern world,” Abizaid said to the Iraqi leaders at the ceremony. “The United States and the international community stand ready to assist you, but the choice between violence and prosperity can only be made by you. Let all of us work together to build the new Iraq. Let Iraq claim its rightful place as a nation of strength and justice for all of its citizens.”